



A newsletter for the employees of FEMA

Vol. 3 No. 6 Nov./Dec. 2000

Director's Message

Dear FEMA Staff:

As we go to print with this newsletter, we do not yet have the outcome of the presidential election. While we do not yet know who will be president, we do know that we will be having a change of administration in the next few months that will affect FEMA and every federal agency.

Transitions are a time of both challenge and opportunity. It is certainly a time of uncertainty, as people throughout the organization leave and new ones take their places. But it is also a time of opportunity, a time to share the FEMA vision with a new management team, a time to protect and enhance the agency's credibility and a

time to show the new administration that FEMA has the best, most professional and dedicated employees of any federal agency.

I have offered my services to help make the transition a smooth one, and I know you will do your part as well. I have every faith that the new president will see FEMA as an agency that underscores the best in government.

Words cannot fully express how much my life has been enriched by working with you this past seven years. Best wishes for a successful future.

James L. Witt



What's Inside



Page 2 Web site access

Page 2 . . . New web site look

Page 3 Holiday safety

Page 3 Gift of safety

Page 4 International Day

Page 4 Firefighter's Memorial

Page 5 Mitigation work schedules

Page 6 Historic FEMA building

Page 7 Los Alamos Fire

Page 8 Kid site mascot

Impact is an employee newsletter published by the Office of Public Affairs

Contact: Holly Harrington

(202) 646-2996
500 C Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20472



Access for all

Changes to FEMA web site helps disabled users

Since the FEMA web site debuted in 1994, it has grown to more than 30,000 pages, with an average of 3 million hits per week, and a reputation for being a vital source of information. Despite the success, improvements were needed.

"We need to make sure that the information on our website is available to all members of our audience, including those with disabilities," said Leslie Weirner-Leandro, chair of the agency's web committee.

FEMA, along with all other federal agencies, is working to make its web site accessible to those who are visually or hearing impaired or who have limited mobility and difficulty

using a mouse to get information. Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act mandated the changes.

According to GSA, the lead-implementing agency for Section 508, the President set a target date of July 26th for initial compliance with this regulation. By this date, the top 20 most visited pages of each federal agency's web site must

be accessible to persons with disabilities.

"We are proud to report that FEMA has readily met the July 26th deadline and that fema.gov is compliant with Section 508," said Weirner-Leandro.

With specially designed screen reader software, the visually impaired can "view" text information on the Internet. By inserting ALT tag descriptions and including alternate text links for all graphics, the visually impaired

can have a similar experience as sighted users when accessing FEMA.gov.

Additional changes such as migrating all server-side image maps to client-side image maps, using header tags on all

tables, and providing descriptive links enhances accessibility for visually impaired users.

Similarly, FEMA can minimize obstacles for those with hearing disabilities by including text versions of audio files. Individuals with limited mobility can use the web site more easily with simple accommodations, such as limiting scrolling and mouse clicks.▲



Web site's new look improves usability

FEMA's web site homepage has a new look – its first redesign in more than three years. The new design is intended to make navigation through the site easier and quicker for visitors.

The agency's web team incorporated features found on some of the most popular sites. The new homepage includes immediate search engine access, expanded mouse-over menus, and a tighter page layout.

A new web page for emergency managers has also been launched. The *Emanagers* page at www.fema.gov/emanagers provides emergency managers with quick access to information of professional interest.

"The web site is always a work in progress. We strive to continuously improve its ability to provide customer service," said Marc Wolfson, the website content manager. "A key element is the e-mail feedback we get from site visitors. They tell us what they like and what they can't find on the site."▲

See related story on
page 8

'Tis the season

Stay safe during the holidays

Each year holiday fires injure 2,000 individuals and cause more than \$500 million in damage. Follow these tips from the U.S. Fire Administration for a safer holiday season:

- ◆ When selecting a tree, make sure the needles are green and hard to pull back from the branches, which indicates the tree is freshly cut. If many needles fall off, the tree has been cut too long, has probably dried out, and is a fire hazard.

- ◆ Don't put your tree close to a heat source, including a fireplace or heat vent. The heat will dry out the tree, causing it to be more easily ignited. Don't put your live tree up too early or leave it up for longer than two weeks. Keep the tree stand filled with water at all times.

- ◆ At the end of the holidays, dispose of the tree by recycling or having it hauled away by a community pick-up service. Don't burn the tree in a fireplace or woodburning stove.

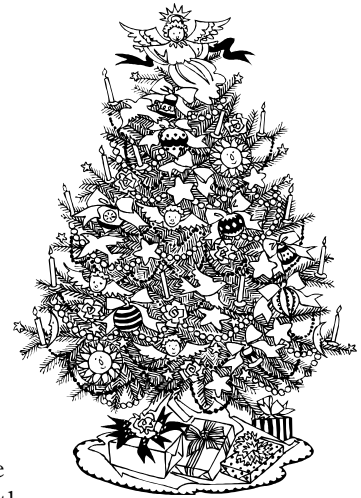
- ◆ Inspect your holiday lights for frayed wires, bare spots, gaps in the insulation, broken

or cracked sockets, and excessive kinking or wear before putting them up. Use only lighting listed by an approved testing laboratory. Don't link more than three light strands, unless the directions indicate it is safe.

Make sure to periodically check the wires. They should not be warm to the touch. **NEVER leave lights on unattended.** Use only nonflammable or flame-retardant holiday decorations.

- ◆ Avoid using lit candles, but if you do use them, make sure they are in stable holders and place them where they cannot be easily knocked down. Never leave the house with candles burning and never put lit candles on a tree.

- ◆ Make sure you have working smoke alarms installed on every level of your home, test them monthly and keep them clean and equipped with fresh batteries at all times. ▲



Don't know what to give someone who has everything? How about the gift of safety?

Do the kids already have too many toys? Does your husband have too many ties? Do you want to show your wife how much you care about her safety?



FEMA has recommendations for you – giving special gifts that keep

your loved ones safe from disaster.

“While FEMA is not in the gift-recommendation business, it's not a bad idea to use the holidays as a time to obtain some of those disaster preparedness and mitigation supplies you've been meaning to get,” said Director James L. Witt. “And just think what a great message the gifts send!”

Suggested disaster-ready gifts include:

- A smoke detector with extra batteries

- Household fire extinguishers for kitchen and all bedrooms (5 pound, A-B-C type)

- A foldable ladder for evacuation of a second story in a fire

- A heavy duty flashlight with extra batteries and a battery-powered lamp

Continued page 8

Flexible workplace promotes both families and productivity

A family-friendly work environment sounds a bit like an oxymoron – sort of a career version of jumbo shrimp.

And if anyone actually did provide such an environment, would it really work?

But when you talk to Bob Shea, division director for the Mitigation Directorate's Program Support Division, and Gil Jamieson, chief of one of the two branches within the division, the concept is not only real but successful.

"Being flexible is not that difficult, and it's provided lots of dividends in terms of happy employees," said Shea.

The family-friendly envi-

ronment for the 21 employees in the division is based, at least in part, on the experiences of Shea and Jamieson, who both have children and working wives.

ronment for the 21 employees in the division is based, at least in part, on the experiences of Shea and Jamieson, who both have children and working wives.

ronment for the 21 employees in the division is based, at least in part, on the experiences of Shea and Jamieson, who both have children and working wives.

ronment for the 21 employees in the division is based, at least in part, on the experiences of Shea and Jamieson, who both have children and working wives.

ronment for the 21 employees in the division is based, at least in part, on the experiences of Shea and Jamieson, who both have children and working wives.

ronment for the 21 employees in the division is based, at least in part, on the experiences of Shea and Jamieson, who both have children and working wives.

ronment for the 21 employees in the division is based, at least in part, on the experiences of Shea and Jamieson, who both have children and working wives.

ronment for the 21 employees in the division is based, at least in part, on the experiences of Shea and Jamieson, who both have children and working wives.

"When people aren't worried about home and family situations, they are much more productive."

ronment for the 21 employees in the division is based, at least in part, on the experiences of Shea and Jamieson, who both have children and working wives.

ronment for the 21 employees in the division is based, at least in part, on the experiences of Shea and Jamieson, who both have children and working wives.

ronment for the 21 employees in the division is based, at least in part, on the experiences of Shea and Jamieson, who both have children and working wives.

Telework comes to FEMA

FEMA offers a variety of programs and work schedules that help increase job satisfaction and supports the expansion of flexible family-friendly workplace arrangements.

The latest program, telework – is an arrangement that allows employees to perform their duties at an alternate work site, including home, other FEMA site, GSA Center or other government building.

The idea behind telework is to increase productivity, en-



Continued on next page

International Day highlights staff's cultural diversity

In February 1998 a group of culturally diverse and enthusiastic employees of FEMA's Region IX began a diversity group called the International Day Committee (IDC).

The employees realized they served customers from different cultures and wanted to learn from each other's backgrounds to improve their understanding of each other – and ultimately their services to others.

The IDC held meetings and sponsored various activities centered around International Day, traditionally held in June.

The region's celebration of International Day for the past three years has brought out cultural

costumes, cultural food sampling, decorations, displays, employee's art work, paintings, pottery, crafts and entertainment by employees.



The region's International Day Committee includes, starting from top left to right: Eliza Chan, Esther Mendiola, Maria Moraga, Francis Tamayo, Fred Sanchez, Jane Aljumaie and Ana Marcelo, Cindy Bernal-Violette and Clara Feldberg. Missing are Carmelia Henderson, Edith Billingsley and Cristal Goussen

“Every member of the International Day Committee is committed to provide time and support needed to the various functions of the IDC,” said Clara Feldberg, the IDC chair. “We strongly believe this is a form of achieving excellence in our daily customer relationships.”

There are other benefits behind the yearly celebrations.

“The IDC encourages a positive, professional attitude and stress relief in our busy work lives,” she said. “And it contributes to the region's morale.” ▲

Telework cont.

hance employee morale and reduce absenteeism. There are three types of telework:

√ Regular Telework: Is being pilot tested over the next year. It allows employees to work up to three nonconsecutive days per week at an alternate work site.

√ Episodic Telework: Allows employee to work at alternate work sites to complete a project or task. This is a temporary arrangement, which is in place for no more than one to two weeks.

√ Medical Telework: Is available to employees with

medical conditions that limit their ability to work at the normal duty station or for employees who are required to care for an ill family member.

To be eligible for telework, employees must have at least a proficient performance rating, clearly defined performance expectations and tasks and an alternate place to work.

Participation in the program should not impact co-workers or office operations. The tasks or activities done via telework must be portable, measurable and not require extensive face-to-face contact.

An employee may termi-

nate a telework arrangement, at any time. Supervisors may terminate an agreement if it adversely impacts the operations of the office or other employees, because of disasters, office needs or other circumstances.

Prior to participating in telework, employees and their supervisors are required to attend a telework training session.

For more on telework or to inquire about training, contact your organization's Telework Coordinator or go to www.fema.gov/library. ▲

Historic Region VIII building added to national register

by Buffy Gilfoil

Building 710 at the Denver Federal Center was completed in 1969 during the thick of the Cold War. Richard Nixon was president, Vietnam was a hot topic and astronaut Neil Armstrong took “one giant leap for mankind” on the moon.

Thirty-one years later, with help from the General Services Administration, the building, now part of FEMA’s Region VIII, was added to the National Register of Historic Places due to its architectural and cultural significance.

The 36,000-square-foot, self-contained, underground facility was intended to provide a regional base for government operations in the event of a tremendous catastrophe or conflict. The structure of reinforced concrete was designed to provide work and living space for approximately 300 essential government personnel for up to 30 days.

The bunker has been continuously occupied by federal agencies charged with civil defense responsibilities – first the Office of Civil Defense, then the Defense Civil Preparedness Agency. FEMA took over in 1979.

Never needed for its

original purpose, Building 710 has provided useful office space for such activities as providing assistance after disasters and protecting against disaster losses. It also serves as an all-hazards shelter.



Government decor in the historic Building 710 was no-frills.

From the outside, Building 710 is hardly noticeable. Only a lobby, which provides the main entrance, protrudes above the earth. From the lobby, stairs lead to one of two huge metal vault-type doors that can close out the world in the event of catastrophe. A guard station is located nearby.

At the core of the building is a command center, which currently houses the Regional Operations Center. Nearby offices include the regional director’s suite with a reception area, conference room and

private offices.

Space for activities of a personal nature is located on a separate level. The mess hall is near a pantry that for years held large cans of rations such as freeze-dried pork chops, creamed cottage cheese and potatoes and beef. Also on this

level were the men’s and women’s dormitories that housed three-tier bunk beds. Lockers lined the hallways. The rest rooms include showers.

The communications center contains state-of-art equipment, including computers, high-frequency radios, amateur radios and 10,000-watt transmitters. Part of the center is enclosed in a separate “metal box” designed for protection from electromagnetic

pulses that would have resulted from a nuclear or atomic detonation.

Redundant systems allow the building to operate independently from public utilities. The power system includes main and back-up generators as well as sensors that can detect a change in current and a switch that can change automatically to batteries. Supplied by an 800-foot well, a 5,000-gallon tank holds water for drinking and washing. Additional water is in

Continued page 8

Devastating Los Alamos fire prompts unique FEMA aid

Legislation directs agency to pay all claims from the disaster

The recently passed Cerro Grande Fire Assistance Act, signed by President Clinton in the wake of the July fires that forced the evacuation of Los Alamos, New Mexico and surrounding towns and resulted in the destruction of more than 400 homes, compelled FEMA to undertake the long-term task of helping affected residents and businesses recover.

Unprecedented in its scope, the act allows for payment to any injured party for virtually any claim not otherwise covered by insurance.

Director James Lee Witt appointed David DeCoursey, current director of Region X, to head FEMA's effort. DeCoursey, along with a small FEMA staff, have worked to make ready the infrastructure necessary to process the anticipated claims. Seven FEMA claims offices opened in the Los Alamos region on August 28, 2000 and have since received approximately 150 residents and business owners.

Director Witt:
"FEMA intends to create a clear and easy process, accessible to all those who need it."

Director Witt, in one Los Alamos town hall meeting attended by more than 750, has made clear his intention to work with the community to make certain FEMA regulations meet the needs of all affected. Interim regulations have been published, with a 60-day comment period.

The act requires FEMA to deal with all claims within 180 days from the date FEMA is officially notified of a claim. Residents and business owners have until August 28, 2002 to file a claim. Claimants who choose to file with FEMA are precluded from later suing the government under the Federal Tort Claims Act.

"People have plenty of time to consider their options, discuss it over with their lawyer or other advisers, and decide whether our process suits them. Congress did a good job of writing a law that provides the greatest amount of coverage with the fewest number of restrictions," said Witt.

A law firm and a public



Photos by Andrea Booher

Above, Federal Coordinating Officer Mark Ghilarducci briefs reporters on FEMA programs for Los Alamos fire victims. Below, a Los Alamos Fire company continues to battle smoldering fires in residential areas.



relations company with extensive ties to the region have been hired to assist the General Counsel and FEMA's Office of Public Affairs. The public relations firm has been asked to develop a work plan designed to address the varied cultural, educational and economic constituencies in the affected area.

"FEMA intends to create a clear and easy process, accessible to all those who need it," said Witt. ▲

Gifts cont.

- A first aid kit
- A battery-powered radio with extra batteries
- A NOAA Weather Radio with a battery backup and tone-alert feature to receive weather and other emergency alerts
- A sturdy plastic tub filled with bottled water and non-perishable, high energy food and canned goods
- A camp stove or canned heat stove, with extra fuel
- A year-long policy for Flood Insurance, available from your insurance agent and backed by FEMA
- Hurricane shutters or cut-to-order marine plywood and heavy nails
- A winter car kit that includes emergency flares, shovel, windshield scraper, battery-powered radio, flash-light, water, snacks, tow chain or rope, tire chains and fluorescent distress flag
- The gift of a gardener to cut back combustible plants and vegetation from around a wildfire-vulnerable house
- Supplies for a pet disaster kit, including food, bottled water, leashes, toys, plastic dish and carrying case or crate
- A year's subscription to an on-line service in order to have access to the FEMA web site and the FEMA for Kids web site. ▲



Kids web site. ▲

FEMA for Kids gets new mascot, look

Herman, P.I.C., and his troubles with finding a safe shell gets children interested in preventing disaster damage

The FEMA for Kids web site got its first redesign this fall since its debut in 1997. The new web site home page integrates Herman, P.I.C., as the “spokescrab” and host of the site.

Herman is a Project Impact Crab who is spreading the word about disaster prevention after learning first hand how devastating disasters can be on an unprotected shell. His story is also new to the web site in both print and audio version. A hard copy of the story can be ordered through the publication’s warehouse.

In addition to introducing the site to visitors, Herman can assist children in navigating the site by suggesting areas to visit and through a search tool.

“We didn’t want to radically change the site, which has been so successful,” said Holly Harrington, the FEMA for Kids web site creator. “But we did feel that a helpful ‘critter’ would be an asset to the site and help us create a specific identify for FEMA for Kids. So far, he appears to be a hit with students.” ▲



Historic cont.

a fire tank and a sump pump may be used to access ground water. The air-intake shaft includes an electronic pulse sensor that can trigger a shut-off in the event of danger.

Along with Building 710, the Office of Civil Defense Emergency Operations Center was also added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2000. This smaller, more rudimentary bunker, also located at the Denver Federal Center, is basically a buried Quonset hut-

type structure. Although the exact date of construction is not known, the 96-foot-by-22-foot structure is believed to have been built after the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 and before federal assistance became available in 1964 for the construction of more substantial structures. It was apparently abandoned after Building 710 was built and it has not been maintained. ▲

Buffy Gilfoil is in Region VIII's Public Affairs Office